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Fernand Schmid: Personal Memories

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Arriving at the Dept of Entomology, University of Alberta, in September, 1962, as a neophyte graduate student, I had ideas about working on Odonata. That idea was quickly vetoed, and I spent the next week or two consulting with faculty re. possible areas of research. George Ball, Systematist, asked if I'd ever considered working on Trichoptera? Leaving his office. I invaded the library to search for information on caddisflies. I'm still searching.

One name recalled from those early days was F.Schmid, author of papers on South American Trichoptera adults. I assumed, incorrectly, that he was resident and working in S.America.

My first memory of Schmid in person is of being employed on the Shadfly Project in Montréal, Summer 1964. That was the first Summer of a project to examine possible problems, at the EXPO 67 site, of mass emergences of aquatic insects, mostly caddis, from the St Lawrence River, and ways to combat these. The project was overseen by Philip Corbet, of Agriculture Canada, Ottawa. Arriving in Ottawa, and at the Entomological Research Institute (later the B.R.I.), I discovered that F.Schmid was already installed, hard at work on his Himalayan Trichoptera. It was many years later that I heard the story of how he came to be there. He, also, was scheduled, much to his disgust, but my pleasure, to be on the Shadfly Project that Summer, as Trichoptera systematist in charge of identifications. He, I, and other summer staff ended up in the old French fort on Île Ste Hélène in the middle of the St Lawrence River, opposite Molson's brewery (on the Montréal (north) side of the river). It was soon suggested, not least by Schmid, that a pipeline be laid across the river to the fort! However, we had to be content with bottled beer. We settled in - work area in the arch-ceiled downstairs main room, living quarters upstairs, each member of the party having their own room, Schmid had brought his Himalayan material with him, in glassine envelopes in tin boxes, and worked, during the day, in the work room, clearing genitalia and mounting them on acetate slips impaled on the same pins as the donors. He pinned or pointed everything, including the minutest hydroptilids. And, some of these were almost like dust they were so small - what one might call nanotrichoptera. It amazed me then, and now, how he could remove the abdomen of one of these tinies, macerate it in KOH, and retrieve it afterward. I ended up as identifier, with Schmid handy in case of problems. In the evenings he worked, in his room upstairs, on the drawings for his monograph on *Rhyacophila*, drinking beer, and listening to his records of classical music. I would often sit looking over his shoulder as he worked, also imbibing beer. When I returned the empties toward the end of the Summer they totalled 29 cases of 24 bottles each, totalling 696 bottles. I hasten to add that he and I were not the only ones involved. One evening, while in his quarters, one of the typical cloud-burst-style storms of Summer Montréal burst over the island – a favourite weekend and evening resort of neighbouring mainland communities. Soon crowds were streaming for the Jacques Cartier Bridge to the mainlands, and home. We were leaning out Schmid's room window dryly surveying the sodden scene below, drinking beer, when Schmid upended his bottle on the heads of passersby below. I don't think that, in their sodden state, they even noticed. A waste of good beer!

I began to learn how to produce passable drawings on such occasions, supplemented by much poring over his Limnophilidae while having a late evening beer, at a local tavern back home in Edmonton.

On sunny afternoons Schmid would often sit in the sun, stripped to the waist, propped up against an outside wall, reading French philosophy – or, at least, philosophy in French.

On one occasion, being curious, I queried him about being francophone, but with a German surname, asking him where he got the name? The question should have been worded otherwise – his reply was 'From my Father'. End of story!

As I recall, the kitchen facilities in our part of the old fort were of the simplest, everyone fending for themselves, and the evening meal was not infrequently taken across the river, in Montréal, most often trying new places each time. It's the only time I may be said to have deliberately taken more than a passing interest in eating, somewhat encouraged by Schmid, who was something of a gourmand – several years in the outback of the Himalayas might be excuse enough!

He decided at one point to have prints made of some of his colour slides from the Himalayas. I took the chance to have 8x11 prints made of two of these, of which one appears on the cover page. Schmid may be seen on the extreme left, facing toward the camera. As he travelled alone, so far as I know, the others must be local assistants. I like to think that this was the occasion when, in, I believe, northern Pakistan, having been warned off by the local authority from approaching the frontier, he simply went south, around a hill, then north into Chinese Sinkiang for 10 km or so, collecting – a story told me one evening. He figured he'd collected 1,800 species of caddis in the Himalayas, 1,400 of which he estimated were new. He also collected other taxa for colleagues, and has, apparently, a genus of Odonata, *Fernandoschmidia*, named after himself, in consequence. On occasions when he encountered a post



Schmid's work bench in his quarters in the fort (Photo: A.Nimmo)

office, or at least a chance of sending material off by mail, he simply mailed the papered specimens, in small tin boxes, to Switzerland. As he said, it might be a year or more before he knew if they'd made it safely through.

Some summers later, as I heard from a fellow graduate student on summer work in Ottawa, Schmid departed, alone, in a Canadian Government vehicle, to collect in western Canada. Seemingly he got about five miles out of Ottawa and, not being the best driver, ended up in the ditch. Unharmed, he needed another vehicle, and returned to Ottawa to arrange for one. He was on his way again before anyone knew of the mishap. He was next heard from when Ottawa received a postcard from California, where he was not supposed to be, or even in the USA. Being government issue, the vehicle was uninsured – the taxpayer would pick up the tab in event of accidents. The news set the dovecotes of Ottawa greatly aflutter, but, happily, he and vehicle returned unscathed.

From January 1976 to January 1977 I worked in Ottawa, and saw Schmid occasionally. I recall two things particularly. Once, while talking with him in his office at the BRI, I noticed a large leather-bound book on his shelves. I think it may have been a peg-bound loose-leaf item. I glanced through it, observing that the (originally) blank pages were partly filled in with pencil drawings of caddis genitalia. He said these had been copied from the original publications, in a library I think, during WW II, when travel or receipt of reprints was difficult. Later that year I was searching the adult caddis collections at the BRI, which included parts of Schmid's collections, for British Columbia, Yukon, and Northwest Territories collection records, for papers of my own. Sadly, in not a few drawers, many pins were surrounded by little dust piles. But the genitalia were preserved in Balsam on pinned acetate squares. Dermestidae! Schmid swore by dry pinning of specimens – the colours were preserved – and eschewed alcohol storage – dries out, colours fade!. 'Tisn't easy, either way.

The fate of his collections? I understand that parts, at least, have found a home at the Royal Ontario Museum, in Toronto.

His love of Orchidaceae is mentioned in the obituary notice. His botanical interests were somewhat broader, in fact. He and Henri Goulet (a mutual colleague at BRI) commissioned me one year to collect growing specimens of *Dedecatheon pauciflorum* (Dur.) Greene (Shootingstar) from the Alberta foothills, for their gardens.

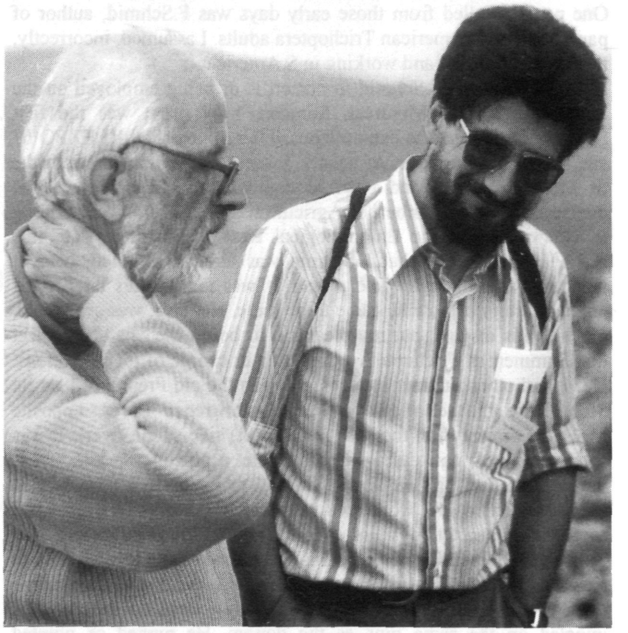
Again, mentioned above, was his naming new species after colleagues. I noticed, while generating index entries for Bibliographia Trichopterorum Vol.1, from his paper on *Gunungiella*, a certain regularity in his new names. Against his usual practice, he refrained from giving the etymology of most new names therein. At the Lyon Symposium, in 1986, on being offered my thoughts on his regularity, he agreed that these species were simply being numbered in Hindi. Which raises the question of his knowledge of languages. French and English, certainly. Probably a fair knowledge of Hindi. Possibly some basic Tibetan. Also, I assume that he had Latin, perhaps Greek, from his schooling in 1930's Switzerland. German, uncertain, except that in a letter from him in the early 1980's, he was ticking me off on a certain linguistic matter, and gave equivalents in several languages, including German, Portuguese, and Spanish! However, much of this is guesswork – can anyone amplify? Certainly, in his naming of *Rhyacophila* n.spp. he seems to demonstrate the results of much reading on Tibet, and Tibetan Buddhism (having done likewise, his references make sense to me).

While on his monographic revision of *Rhyacophila*, one may recall that the illustrations were on folded sheets, à la Playboy. In conversation with the ladies responsible for cobbling together issues of Canadian Entomologist, and the Ent.Soc.Canada Memoires, I well recall their sulphurous commentry on this style of 'plating' a paper. Those familiar with Schmid's publications will recall how many of the more recent ones have these fold-outs, but only one in an Entomological Society of Canada publication – the first, and very definitely the last!

Returning to the Summer of 1964, in Montréal. I once wondered aloud about his ability to detect the detail in some minute specimens. His comment was that one had to train oneself to see what was there – a comment about which I've felt a sense of unease ever since. I also noticed his tendency to round-off his drawings to the supposed Platonic 'ideal', rather than draw the specimen precisely as he saw it – a cautionary note.

A final note. The Entomological Society of Canada occasionally asked me to act as a referee for his MSS submitted to them. There was damn all to find fault with, except for occasional nit picking small items. One thing which especially annoyed him was my objection to his translation of place names, wherever possible, to French. It took me five minutes, once, to twist New South Wales from Nouvelle Galles du Sud.

Unfortunately, while at Montréal, it never occurred to me to play Boswell to his Johnston. But, all in all, he was a man of wide interests beyond the Trichoptera. A man who liked his creature comforts, but who was prepared to forego them when on shikar, and returned to them undiminished. He had a sense of humour without being boisterous. He was prepared to try anything once and also, I think, dabbled in the mystical philosophies of the East.



Fernand Schmid, 1986 Lyon Trichoptera Symposium. Field trip to Massif Central, with D.G.de Jalón. (Photo: Bert Higler)

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